

Inheritance

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Summary: Transformation is not always a free action. When Piccolo kills Freeza on Namek, it sets in motion events both good and bad, and completely divergent from the original timeline. For Freeza is not the only enemy out there in the stars...

1. Chapter 1

****AN:** Say hello to my new project as I let the creative juices for The Commission recharge. This particular divergence was inspired by a video by Youtuber Qaaman's Land a while back, and many of the plot beats up to the Android Saga will be borrowing from his speculation. And don't be put off by the repeat of the manga at the start, this goes off the rails very quickly. ******

****Also?** The title is foreshadowing. Let's see if you can guess what.

****Chapter 1: Revolution****

Just moments ago, Planet Namek had been torn by battle, but now it was briefly peaceful as the two fighters reassessed their chances. Piccolo, the Namekian of Earth, kept up his stance as he watched his opponent, a slightly cocky smirk on his face. So far he was untouched. Up in the air was Freeza, the galactic real-estate-mogul-slash-emperor, and he was rather less composed. Also smoking slightly from the energy blast he'd just been hit with.

Some distance away floated Son Gohan and Krillin of Earth, as well as Vegeta, Prince of all Saiyans. All three gaped at the short but intense bout they'd just seen.

"He's as strong as Freeza!" Krillin finally managed to get out.

"No he's not," Vegeta countered through gritted teeth, his face falling into a disbelieving scowl. "He's even _stronger._"

That proclamation caused both Earthlings to grin widely. "Wow! I didn't know he was so strong!" Gohan exclaimed.

"Yeah, we might just get out of this yet!"

'_How is this possible?' _Vegeta mentally demanded. '_It's been barely over a month since Nappa killed him on Earth.'_

Vegeta's thoughts and Gohan's and Krillin's celebration were cut short as Freeza slowly floated down to the island Piccolo stood on, his face in a tight scowl. And then it morphed into a confident smirk.

"Heh."

Piccolo only had time to blink before the galactic tyrant rammed his right elbow into the warrior's cheek. This was followed up by an overhead punch that buried the Namekian's face in the dirt. A third punch slammed into the ground as Piccolo took flight, soaring upwards. Freeza immediately followed, rapidly overtaking his opponent and nailing him with an overhead slam that sent Piccolo spiraling into the island below, throwing up a large cloud of dust.

"Heheheh," Freeza chuckled as he watched his handiwork.

"Ohâ€¦ Oh Godâ€¦ He was just faking itâ€¦" Krillin breathed in numb, open-mouthed horror. Beside him, Gohan and Vegeta were in a similar state of shock.

'_H-His power is limitless,' _Vegeta thought in disbelief. '_And _I _was trying to fight that monster?'_

Back on the battlefield, rock clattered as Piccolo painfully pulled himself to his feet, his clothing torn and a small wound bleeding on his forehead. Once again, Freeza descended to the ground, but this time he was smirking confidently from the start, his arms crossed and thus out of his guard.

"Heh, do forgive me, Piccolo," he said politely. "You were better than I expected, so I couldn't resist teaching you a little lesson." The smirk turned downright venomous as Piccolo finally stood. "But this game is over."

Piccolo's response was to spit out a glob of blood and saliva. Reaching up, he lifted his cape and mantle off his shoulders, dropping it to the ground with a heavy thud. The turban came next, also thudding to the ground as Freeza look on, confused. He flexed his wrists and shook his head to unlimber his neck, then shot a confident smirk at Freeza.

"Good idea," he said. "I should probably get serious, too."

Freeza's eyes narrowed in realization. "You mean you were- Hmph. I thought Namekians didn't tell lies."

"Huh? Oh, yeah, his weights!" Gohan exclaimed.

"W-What's he doing, playing around at a time like this?" Krillin groaned, Vegeta sending a confused glance at him.

"You'll soon find out," Piccolo replied. "Now feel the pain of all the Namekians you murdered!"

"We can win!" Gohan proclaimed, a tentative smile on his face.

That weak confidence soon faltered as they saw Freeza simply smirk again in response. "I see I've given you the wrong idea!" he said. "You think something like that would bother me? You don't seem to know about my transformations. You could ask Vegeta, if he isn't too afraid to speak!"

"Transformationsâ€¦?" Piccolo slowly repeated.

"Heh. Are you beginning to feel afraid? Then let me tell you this." Grinning, Freeza held up two fingers. "My power increases hugely every time I transform. And I have two more transformations left."

Piccolo's eyes widened in realization. "Y-You mean-!"

"N-No way!" Krillin exclaimed as Vegeta and Gohan recoiled in horror. "I-I didn't hear that! Two more transformations?"

"You should feel honored!" Freeza continued. "You are the first one to ever see this! Ggghhâ€¦!"

Freeza raised his arms, his power starting to climb - only to throw himself to the side as he saw a spiraling energy beam fly towards him. Though the action saved him from acquiring a new hole in his torso, the beam still tore a chunk out of his side and left his left arm hanging by a few scraps of meat. Landing on his knees, his good arm clutching at his wound, the tyrant sent a baleful glare at Piccolo, who had his arms stretched out towards him, palms-first.

"W-Why youâ€¦!"

"Did you really think I'd just stand there and let you transform?" Piccolo sneered. "It's over, Freeza."

Crouching, Piccolo kicked off the ground and tore towards Freeza at high speed. The tyrant, for his part, attempted to dodge the charge, but with the gaping wound in his side he was too slow. Piccolo merely changed direction, swinging his right hand in a chop. The knife-like hand blade carved through Freeza's mangled arm, barely slowing before lodging itself in the soft flesh of his side wound.

"Gnh!" he grunted, trying to tug his way out of Piccolo's grip. Before he could do so, though, the Namekian swung around and latched onto his good arm.

"Die!" Piccolo shouted, charging a blast in his right hand - only for Freeza to finagle just enough movement in his right hand to envelop him in an energy sphere.

"I-I can't move!" Piccolo grunted as he tried to break free.

"Begone!" Freeza shouted, shooting the energy ball at the horizon. The ball, with Piccolo in it, sailed a few miles before hitting one of the rocky islands and detonating in a colossal explosion that buffeted the trio watching.

For a moment, Gohan, Vegeta, and Krillin could only stare at the blooming mushroom cloud in mounting horror. The moment was promptly broken by Gohan tearing off after Freeza.

"You-!" he shouted, his aura blazing around him. The action shook Krillin and Vegeta out of their paralysis, the former starting to fly after Gohan before Vegeta grabbed him by the wrist.

"What are you-!"

"You wouldn't make any difference," Vegeta stated, deathly calm. "Besides, can't you feel ki? Take a look."

Krillin angrily ripped his wrist out of Vegeta's grip, and cast his senses out, recoiling in surprise when felt a large ki heading towards them from ground zero of the explosion.

"Exactly," Vegeta said as the bald martial artist's eyes widened. "We'll be fine, we just need to sit back and watch."

Despite the optimistic words, though, Krillin could see the Saiyan's fists clenched at his sides, tight enough to shake slightly.

Freeza, for his part, was trying to gather enough focus through the haze of pain to try and transform. If he could transform, he could fix at least some of the damage, and then he could slaughter all these insects for their impudence! So focused was he on this action that he didn't notice Gohan streaking towards him.

"Dyaaaaaaaah!"

At least, not until Gohan's boot impacted the side of his head. The tyrant went flying, skipping once, twice off the water and slamming into the nearest island, the impact burying him in shattered rock. Gohan followed it up by throwing a salvo of blasts that left the island a smoking ruin.

Panting, Gohan scanned the shattered island as the smoke cleared, flinching as he saw the prone, unmoving form of Freeza lying on the rock. The barest hints of chi told him that the tyrant was still alive, if barely. Scrunching up his face, Gohan readied another blast to finish him off - only for a hand to touch down on his shoulder.

"I'll handle this, Gohan," Piccolo said, his skin dotted with minor burns and his clothes sporting a few new holes, but otherwise unscathed.

"Piccolo!" Gohan exclaimed. "How did you-!"

"I was able to break free right as it exploded," he explained. "I didn't avoid all of it, but I suspect he wasn't able to put as much energy into the blast as he usually does." Turning his gaze back on the tyrant, he began to descend. "Wait here."

The Namekian touched down next to Freeza's prone form, and knelt to check his breathing. He needn't have bothered; Freeza tried to swat at his feet with an angry growl.

"Killâ€| youâ€|" he wheezed out of battered lungs.

"The only one dying here and now is you, Freeza," Piccolo retorted, standing up and pointing his palm at the downed Arcosian.

"Hehehehâ€| My fatherâ€| will do itâ€| not meâ€|"

Piccolo didn't respond in favor of releasing the blast, which neatly disintegrated Freeza's body and several hundred feet of rock below.

"Well, I suppose we'll just have to kill him, too," he remarked, before turning his attention skyward.

~o~

"My wordâ€|" King Kai breathed.

"What happened?" Tenshinhan immediately asked.

"Freezaâ€| is dead. Piccolo killed him." The Kai let out a pleased harrumph. "I honestly didn't expect that. Good call attacking him during the transformation."

"Well, that's Piccolo for you," Yamcha unknowingly echoed. "Powerful, smart, and pragmatic as all hell. I guess we can enjoy it until he's our enemy again."

"Mm, I doubt it," King Kai absently replied as he continued watching the events on Namek. "His bond with young Gohan is strong enough that I don't think he'll try anything like that."

The three Z-fighters present lapsed into an uncomfortable silence at that, none of them entirely willing to bet the fate of the planet on some nebulous bond.

"Soâ€| what now?" Chiaotzu wondered after a few moments.

"Well, for now it seems Piccolo will be fulfilling a promise," King Kai responded. "As for you three, you'll likely have to wait for the Earth Dragon Balls. I'm sorry, Chiaotzu."

The small fighter winced at that, his head drooping. Having died twice, the Earth Dragon Balls would be unable to restore him.

Tenshinhan, naturally, noticed his partner's distress, and shot him a reassuring smile. "Don't worry, Chiaotzu, I'll stay here," he said comfortingly. "We'll always be together, right?"

King Kai could only sigh at the exchange. Such a tragedy, letting those two talents stay dead.

"_Lord of the Worlds. Lord of the Worlds! It is I, God of

Earth!"_

Hello, what's this?

"Yes, I hear you," King Kai replied.

~O~

Vegeta held himself open as Piccolo floated up to him and Krillin, Gohan by his side. The Namekian very much looked the part of the stern judge, his arms crossed in front of him.

"I told you you were next, Vegeta," he said grimly.

"W-Wait, Piccolo!" Krillin cut in, floating in front of the Saiyan. "He saved our lives so many times on Namek, that has to count for something! A-And Goku wanted to have a rematch with him!"

"And does that excuse all the innocent people he's killed here and elsewhere?" Piccolo retorted. "Besides, why should I indulge Goku's stupidity?"

"I-" Krillin started, only for Vegeta to cut him off by shoving him out of the way.

"I don't want your mercy, Earthling," he spat, before turning to Piccolo. "Let's get this over with."

Piccolo quirked a hairless brow in surprise. "You're not going to run?"

"If I thought that would work, I would," Vegeta retorted, sliding into a fighting stance. "As it is, running would be pointless. And given the choice between dying running or fighting, I'll take fighting any day."

Piccolo nodded in approval. "I can respect that."

Krillin and Gohan drifted out of the way as Piccolo settled into his own stance. For a few tense moments, the two sized each other up-

And then Vegeta, in one fluid movement, shot his palms forward and fired off the strongest energy blast he could muster. At such short range, even Piccolo couldn't dodge.

So he didn't try.

The blast slammed into his open palms, pushing his arms back slightly. With a roar of effort, Piccolo pushed forward with all his might, shooting it back at Vegeta at even higher speeds. The Saiyan barely had time to react before the energy swallowed him up, neatly disintegrating him.

Still, Piccolo didn't relax until the blast cleared, at which point he lowered his arms and glanced down at a nearby bluff.

"You can come out now, Dende," he called down.

Both Krillin and Gohan started, the former chuckling and rubbing the

back of his head. "Oh, right, kinda forgot he was there."

"That's mean, Krillin," Gohan admonished as the young Namekian flew up.

Once at the same altitude, Dende took one look at Piccolo before putting his hands out. The warrior raised a brow as he felt his wounds vanish before his eyes.

"Impressive," he said. "Do I have powers like this?"

"No, you're a warrior Namekian," Dende answered. He bit his lip before seeming to come to a decision. "How do you know my name? You're not a Namekian I've met before."

"I fused with another warrior before fighting Freeza," Piccolo answered. "A warrior named Nail."

"Of course," Dende breathed, before shooting his gaze to the horizon. "Someone's coming! Someone— someone stronger than Freeza!"

Gohan, Piccolo, and Krillin all tensed for a moment - before relaxing as they all recognized the ki signature.

"Eh, it's fine, Dende," Krillin assured him. "It's just Goku."

Sure enough, not two seconds later the orange-clad Saiyan came to a halt in front of them, looking quite serene.

"Ah, so that big, mysterious ki was you, Piccolo," he said. "Dragon Balls must've revived you, huh?" Suddenly, Goku's serene smile melted into a petulant pout. "You could've left me Vegeta! I promised to have a rematch with him!"

"At the level you're at now, I doubt he would've been much of a challenge," Piccolo pointed out.

"That's a good point," Goku conceded. "Well, whatever. What's the plan?"

"With my resurrection, the Earth Dragon Balls should be active again," Piccolo mused. "Unfortunately, that would still leave Chiaotzu dead."

"A-And Piccolo and I are the only Namekians left," Dende lamented. "Without the Great Elder—"

A somber mood fell on the group, only for King Kai to cut in.

"_Never fear, everyone! I have a plan! Kami-Sama contacted me a little while ago. We'll use the Earth Dragon Balls to resurrect the Namekians killed by Freeza, and best-case scenario we'll revive the Great Elder, too."_

The five gaped for a second, Krillin, Gohan and Dende as much at a voice talking in their heads, until Piccolo spoke up.

"Will that work?" he asked. "My understanding is that the Great Elder died of old age, and that the Dragon Balls can't resurrect people who

died of natural causes."

"Yeah, Kami went over that with me while I was training with him," Goku confirmed. "King Kai, what are you thinking?"

"_This is a gamble," _ came the heavenly reply. "_But if the Great Elder's encounter with Freeza hastened his death, we might be able to get him back for a short while."_

"Kind of a long shotâ€¦!"

"_I know, but that's the best plan I can come up with."_

"D-Do it."

All eyes turned to Dende.

"A-Are you sure?" Gohan asked.

"Yes," Dende replied, determination filling his voice. "Even if it doesn't bring back the Great Elder, it will bring back the rest of my race. There are elders who could take up the mantle; my elder, Muri, was one of them."

"Wellâ€¦ if you're sure," Gohan decided.

"_Alright, then, sounds like we have a plan. Just give us a few minutes for this, ah, 'Mr. Popo' to finish up the wish, and then we can see if this works or not."_

With nothing to do but wait, the Z-fighters drifted down to a nearby island, sitting and watching the sky, the other four confirming to Goku that the sky did indeed turn dark on Namek as well as Earth.

Finally, after a few minutes, the sky darkened. And just as importantly, all felt several dozen ki signatures flare back to life all over the planet.

"It workedâ€¦!" Dende breathed, before shooting to his feet and throwing his hands in the air. "It works, it works!"

"I'll say!" Goku chimed in as he stared at the towering form of Porunga. "Check out the dragon! It's huge!" He paused, frowning. "What wish do we want, anyway?"

"I dunno," Krillin shrugged. "How long do these things take to recharge?"

"Yamcha," Piccolo firmly replied. "Tenshinhan and Chiaotzu will want to be resurrected together. And if the recharge time is too long, we can always come back."

There were nods all around at that. "Alright, sounds good!" Goku announced. "Let's go!"

As the Z-fighters flew off, Gohan couldn't help but feel they were all forgetting something.

Krillin had been clueless when he'd asked the bald martial artist.

"Well, the only thing I can think of is--"

Both of their eyes widened.

"Bulma!"

2. Chapter 2

****Chapter 2: Homecoming****

****AN: Be honest with me, guys. Am I going too fast? I feel like I might be going too fast. ****

"I cannot believe you two!" Bulma screeched at Krillin and Gohan as the latter carried her by her armpits. "Six days! You're gone for six days, you show up and grab the Dragon Ball with Vegeta in tow, and then fly off again without a word!"

"She's your friend, Goku," Piccolo whispered to the Saiyan from where the two were flying ahead. "Is she usually like this?"

"Actually, I'm kinda surprised she's taking it this well," Goku replied.

The party - Goku and Piccolo in front, Gohan, Krillin, and Bulma behind - had just finished picking up the Capsule Corp. heir after managing to wish Yamcha back to life. Dende had flown off to go reunite with his old village shortly after dictating the wish, and as of now, they were heading to the Great Elder's residence, where they could feel his life force slowly fading. All around them they could feel the ki of what seemed like every Namekian on the planet, converging on the rock spire.

Allâ€| and yet, fewer than they should number. A village seemed to be missing.

'_Elder Tsuno's village,' _Nail's memories helpfully supplied. '_The one Vegeta attacked.'_

Not for the first time, Piccolo cursed the Saiyan Prince's name. Apparently, the wish to resurrect the Namekians had specified 'Freeza and his men', and Vegeta had already started his rebellion by then. Damn loopholes...

"And another thing!" Bulma continued. "I have gone _six days _without a bath! That spaceship of yours better have one, Goku!"

"Don't worry," Goku called back in the conciliatory tone of the thoroughly whipped. "You get first dibs once we get back."

Bulma's expression immediately did a 180. "Oh, that's fine, then."

"Women," Piccolo muttered under his breath.

Blessed silence fell over the group as they came up to the Great Elder's residence, and soon it was in sight. The three flying freely came in for a landing outside the damaged building, Gohan carefully setting Bulma down before landing himself.

"So, uh, how do we do this?" Krillin wondered as he looked up at the barred door and the hole above. "Do we just-"

He was promptly cut off by Piccolo sweeping ahead, the door opening for him.

"Okay then," Krillin shrugged before following.

One by one, each of the Earthlings stepped into the cavernous main room, Bulma and Goku both gawking at the sheer bulk of the Great Elder.

"Welcome back, my friends!" the Great Elder croaked. "I thank you for ridding this world of a great evil." His body shifted slightly, his sightless gaze falling on Piccolo. "Step forward, my child."

The warrior did so, and the Great Elder placed a massive palm on his head. He held that position for a few minutes before withdrawing it with a weary sigh. "Ah, Nail. A better end than he would have gotten, I suppose. And you, Saiyan! I sense great power, great kindness in you. And! the Super Saiyan."

Both Gohan and Krillin perked up a bit at that. Vegeta had thrown the term around before, though _what_ a Super Saiyan was still remained unclear.

Clearly, Goku shared the sentiment. "What is a Super Saiyan, Great Elder?" he asked.

"Ask a thousand races and you will get a thousand answers," the Great Elder replied. "But at its core, it is power. And like all power, whether it is good or bad depends on who wields it."

Goku's shoulders sagged, as if some unseen tension had fled him. "Thank you."

"You are welcome." The Great Elder shifted again, his gaze drifting outside. "Ah, my children approach. Piccolo, would you bring Muri in before the rest?"

"Of course, Elder," Piccolo replied, inclining his head respectfully before leaving. Moments later, he returned, the elder Namekian just behind him.

"Muri," the Great Elder said. "You shall be the Great Elder, with my passing. Bring life back to the Dragon Balls, and prosperity to our people."

"Of course, Great Elder," Muri replied.

The Great Elder shifted back in his giant chair, and turned his gaze to the hole in the roof, where Namekians were streaming in, staring stricken at their leader.

"I am glad! to have known all of you, my children!"

The giant Namekian took one last shuddering breath! and then went still. All present hung their heads slightly in respect.

"Great Elder," Piccolo whispered. "Rest in peace."

There was silence for a moment more before Goku broke it in his usual cheerful manner. "So, what's the plan now, guys?"

"For now, I must confirm myself to the Namekians," Muri answered, before smiling at the Earth fighters. "And then, we need to see about getting the Dragon Balls back. After all you've done, resurrecting the last of your friends is the least we could do."

"And how long will this take?" Bulma inquired, eyes narrowed.

"Hmmâ€¦ it would takeâ€¦" Muri mused before beckoning Piccolo over and whispering in his ear.

"140 days," he answered.

"Right, 140 of your days before we can use the Dragon Balls again," Muri concurred. "You can stay, or if your ship is fast enough you can leave and then return."

"Ah, we should probably leave," Goku said, rubbing the back of his head. "My wife's gonna kill me if me'n Gohan stay out here too long."

"Yeah, I'd like to get back to Earth myself," Krillin agreed. "No offense."

"Bathsâ€¦ hot foodâ€¦ _bedsâ€¦_" Bulma moaned, drool dripping from her mouth.

Piccolo seemed to mull things over, before smiling and shaking his head. "Humans," he grumbled good-naturedly. "Thank you for the offer, Elder, but Earth is my home now. Besides, I still have all of Nail's memories. They will suffice."

"Very well," Muri stated agreeably. "Still, I must insist you stay one more day so that we can properly honor you."

"Will there be food?" Goku wondered, licking his lips.

"Actually, Namekians don't eat," Krillin piped up. "They just drink water."

"Aww!"

~O~

A few hours later, the round Capsule Corp. ship lifted off from Namek, bearing the five Earthlings home. On the planet itself, the Namekians tended to their gardens, started work on rebuilding their villages, and began dismantling Freeza's ship, casting the parts into the deep trenches of Namek's oceans.

Six days later, the Earthlings would return to their planet, and to old routines. The Namekians would get on with their lives, content in the isolation of their planet.

And though none were foolish enough to believe that there was nothing

that could threaten their hard-won peace, they had no idea the forces that would soon be operating against them.

~O~

"What?!"

Cooler gaped at the holographic image of his father, wondering if he had heard him right. Not that he vocalized that thought; he liked living, thank you very much.

"_Yes, Freeza is missing," _King Cold, tyrannical emperor of the galaxy, spat. "_His ship's transponder has vanished, and he has failed to report in for months! Either he is playing pointless games, or someone has _killed _him."_

Cooler's mind whirled as he considered and discarded possibilities. A prank was not like his brother. As much as they disliked each other, Cooler knew his brother maintained at least some pride in his professionalism. And it was unlikely he was simply stranded, either. At full power, he could be detected clear across the galaxy. That left someone killing him, and yet, that begged another question.

"Who could kill Freeza?" Cooler wondered aloud. "And more importantly, how could we not have heard of them?"

"_We both know that not all of the galaxy is mapped," _Cold replied, waving his hand dismissively. "_And what lies beyond the galactic rim is still a mystery, even to us. Most likely, Freeza went to subjugate a primitive society, and accidentally bit off more than he could chew."_

"If that's true, then his records should beâ€| enlightening," Cooler slowly responded. It was a good theory his father had, but something was niggling at the back of his mind. A memoryâ€|

His eyes shot wide open. '_The Saiyan!' _he mentally exclaimed. '_The child that got away when Planet Vegeta was destroyed! It's unlikely, but if he was a Super Saiyanâ€| heh. Brother always was the one who put more stock in that old legend, and yet here I am, jumping to the same conclusion. Still, it's worth investigating."_

Out loud, he said, "I shall leave that to your men, Father. I have a lead of my own to pursue." He paused, a thought occurring to him. "It occurs to me that this will take me away from my duties for some time. If I mayâ€|"

"_Sorbet can handle the administrative side, and we have at least a few soldiers that can act as muscle,"_ King Cold answered the unspoken question. "_Good hunting, my son. And if you do find the culprit, avenge the honor of our family."_

And with that, the call ended.

Cooler took a moment to relax. Talking with his father was always exhausting; he had to be constantly on his guard, lest he let slip something that could get him killed. Finally, he called back to the members of his Armored Squadron who were manning the bridge.

"Salza, plot a course for Earth," he announced. "And Neiz, send our schedule for the next month to Sorbet, he'll be handling things while we're gone."

"Yes, milord," both soldiers replied.

As the ship accelerated to FTL, Cooler allowed a smile to creep across his face.

'_This is going to be fun.'_

~O~

"Alright, carry the fiveâ€|" Gohan muttered to himself as he worked on his math homework. Astounding how quickly things changed. Almost as soon as he and Goku had arrived back at their Mt. Piaoze home, Chichi had parked the young half-breed's butt in his study chair. After a year of near constant training and fighting, it was an abrupt transition. Though, not an unwelcome one.

Right now, Goku should still be visiting Master Roshi's house on the way back from Kami's palace, where Tenshinhan and Chiaotzu had just returned from their resurrection. He'd been on a whirlwind tour, catching up on old friends. His death and subsequent resurrection was likely the catalyst.

Though they still didn't know where Lunch was.

"Oh, Gohan!"

Gohan looked up to see his mother, Chi-Chi, stride in, a glass of iced tea held on a tray in her hands.

"How's my little scholar doing?" she cooed. Not waiting for an answer, she plopped the iced tea down next to Gohan. "I thought you might be thirsty, so I made you some tea!"

"Thanks, mom," Gohan replied, taking a sip as he continued on his homework. "Oh, by the way, Dad's back."

"He is?" Chi-Chi replied, her face drawing into an annoyed scowl. "Well, I won't begrudge him meeting his friends, but that man has chores to do!"

And with that, she stomped out. Gohan shrugged, and went back to work. Better Goku than him.

He only made it through a few more problems before he heard voices coming from the dining room. The tones were very familiar, his parents arguing about something. Again. Before Raditz, Gohan would've tried to ignore it and gone back to his studies. Instead, he slipped out of his chair and opened the door a tad, his ear at the crack.

"- And I said no!" Chi-Chi barked. "Camping?! He's a year behind, he still has a ton of catching up to do!"

"C'mon, Chi-Chi, you've kept him cooped up in here for months! Kids need time outdoors, look!"

There was a rustling of paper before Chi-Chi continued. "What is

this?"

"It's a research thing Bulma gave me when I last visited her. All scientific and stuff. And look, it says boys need exercise outdoors for healthy development."

There was a pregnant silence before Chi-Chi let out a sigh. "How long were you planning to camp?"

"Eh, two, maybe three days."

There was another pause, presumably as Chi-Chi mulled things over.

"Alright, I suppose he's earned a break."

Gohan grinned, and slowly closed the door before climbing back into his chair. Sure enough, he'd barely done so when Goku threw the door open, grinning.

"Hey, Gohan, do you wanna go camping for a couple days with Krillin and Oolong?" he asked.

"Sure!" Gohan immediately replied. "When are we going?"

"Tomorrow. It's a little late to be setting out today," came the answer. "Well, I'll let you get back to work. Hey, Chi-Chi, when's dinner?"

Chuckling at his Dad's appetite and the shouted answer that it elicited, Gohan turned back to his homework. It would be fun to get outdoors for a while again. And for once, it wouldn't have anything trying to kill him. He shuddered. Strong as he was now, that damn dinosaur still haunted his nightmares.

~O~

"We have arrived at Earth, Lord Cooler," Salza reported.

"Excellent," Cooler replied. "Open the viewing screens."

On cue, the image of a blue-and-green planet streaked with white clouds popped up on screen. It was unremarkable, similar to thousands such planets scattered across the galaxy.

"Such a small planet," Cooler mused. "One shot would suffice." He chuckled briefly. "Of course, that would miss the point of an investigation. Neiz, I want a full scan of the planet."

"Yes, Lord Cooler!" the amphibious soldier replied, immediately tapping in the requisite commands.

In truth, the scanners weren't entirely necessary. Cooler could feel ki, a little trick he'd picked up from a primitive race before exterminating them. Unfortunately, whoever had power on the planet was keeping it well-hidden, even from his senses. The scanners on board the ship were not only more powerful, they had an advanced filtering program installed to measure the potential maximum of even suppressed fighters.

"Oh ho!" Neiz exclaimed after several minutes. "My, this is an unusual planet, isn't it?"

"Huh? Whaddya mean?" Dore grunted, shambling over to where Neiz sat and looking at the screen. "That can't be rightâ€|"

"Report, if you please, instead of standing around like slack-jawed idiots."

"Apologies, Lord Cooler," Neiz simpered, pushing Dore away. "I was simply surprised to find that there are an even seven power signatures that the computer is telling me could reach into the five-digit mark."

"Really now?" Cooler queried, genuinely surprised. That many high-level signatures was damn rare outside of the PTO's fortress planets. "Well, that's unusual. And the Saiyan?"

"I'm afraid the computer is still filtering the data," Neiz replied. "Still, it should have a lock by tomorrow."

"Acceptable," Cooler decided. "Prepare for battle. If the Saiyan is on this planet, and if he killed my brother, then we are in for a very tough fight."

~o~

"Hmâ€|" Oolong hummed as he monitored the boiling vats of rice over the massive fire they'd built. "I'd say the rice is almost done."

"Ah, good, the stew's coming along nicely, too," Krillin added as he stirred a large pot. "Soon as Goku gets back with the fish, we should be ready to eat."

Noting that the fire had burned down somewhat, the bald martial artist reached for another plank of wood, only to come up blank.

"Hey, Gohan!" Krillin called out to where the demi-Saiyan was building a riverside rock castle. "We need some more firewood!"

"On it!" Gohan called back in reply. As he jogged up to the pile of logs they'd set up, he couldn't help but hum a cheerful tune. This was fun, even the firewood chopping. That required precision ki-work, precision he still needed practice with.

Grabbing a log from the top of the pile, Gohan heaved it into the air, jumped up, and swung his hand in a high-speed series of chops that left the log cut into manageable planks. Tapping to the ground, Gohan heard the satisfying sound of the logs clacking together - and then flushed as the even clacking degraded into a jumbled mess.

Looking behind him, he found that though most of the logs were nice and straight, some had gotten cut crooked. He shrugged. Well, they were going to get burned, anyway.

"Firewood's done!" Gohan called out to Krillin.

"And I've got the fish!" Goku announced as he floated up from where he'd been fishing down the river, a massive fish bigger than him slung over one shoulder. "Sorry it's a little small!"

"I swear, his appetite never ceases to amaze," Oolong said, shaking his head ruefully.

"I know, right?" Krillin agreed as he took the pot off the fire.

Goku, oblivious to his friends' amazement at his appetite, threw down the fish and raised his arm to cut it - only to freeze, his gaze darting to the tree line. Oolong glanced about as Krillin and Gohan stood, their eyes flinty and looking the same way Goku was.

"I know you're there," he announced, his voice bereft of any of its usual goofiness. "Show yourself."

Four figures floated out from behind the trees. Three wore what at first glance appeared to be the standard armor of Freeza's soldiers, though a second glance would reveal key differences, namely a purple bodysuit instead of blue or black, no right shoulder guard, and different detail design for the armor.

All four were clearly aliens. The three armored ones consisted of what looked for all the world like a blue-skinned blond man, a towering, green-skinned and wild-haired man, and a bipedal salamander.

But it was the figure in the center, hanging back ever so slightly, that drew their attention. Because he looked distressingly similar to Freeza, in general body shape at least, though the details were quite different.

"You must be the Saiyan," the Freeza-like alien stated, pointing at Goku. "The hair, your age—it all fits."

"Oh, really?" Goku retorted, sliding his right foot back slightly. "You found me. Congrats. Now, what do you want?"

"You will not talk to Lord Cooler like that, you-!" the blue-skinned one snarled, lunging forward only to be halted by this 'Lord Cooler'.

"Calm yourself, Salza. He is a Saiyan. To expect anything even approaching common courtesy is a fool's errand." Cooler turned his gaze on Goku. "To answer your question, I am here to see if you killed my brother."

"Your brother?" Goku breathed, eyes widening.

"Yes. You may know him as Freeza."

And then he moved.

Faster than almost anyone there could track, he darted forward, fist drawn back for a punch. The blow met nothing but air as Goku leaped back to the opposite shore.

"Ho," Cooler breathed, straightening up. "Perhaps this will be interesting after all. Men, kill the riff-raff. I will handle the Saiyan."

And with that, the two combatants darted forward, their forearms meeting over the river as each tried to slam their elbow into the other. A punch was thrown and blocked, as was a kick, and then more and more blows raining down in a back-and-forth block-and-strike.

Finally, a hole opened up in Goku's guard, Cooler taking the opportunity to wrap his tail around Goku's ankle and throw him into the waterfall pool they had drifted over. For a moment, Cooler waited, the waters still and silent.

His patience was rewarded with an energy sphere shooting out from the water. He blurred, dodging out of the way, and then evaded again as another energy ball shot out of the water. Without even looking, he raised his arm, catching Goku's flying mule kick, though it did push him back a bit.

"Nice try, Saiyan," he taunted. "That might have worked on my brother, but it won't work on me!"

The Arcosian punctuated his point by throwing a knee strike at Goku. To his dismay, his opponent caught it, vaulted over him, and then slammed a kick into his head that sent him careening into the ground.

He landed in a three-point stance, the stone cracking beneath him, and immediately dove out of the way as Goku slammed his fist into the ground, firing a salvo of death beams behind him. Goku merely deflected them with his free hand, and flew off after Cooler. They both tore skyward until a hairpin turn had Cooler diving right at Goku. Punches were thrown and caught simultaneously, the sky roaring from the impact.

It was Goku who broke the lock, twisting around and throwing Cooler straight down. By the time the Arcosian righted his flight, it was too late for him to dodge the energy blast coming at him. He threw his palms out, catching the blast and straining against it. For a moment, everything hung in the balance, and then Cooler tossed it away.

Still, it was a distraction, and Goku made him pay for it by slamming his elbow into his opponent's kidneys. Cooler retaliated by spinning around and slamming one leg into Goku's temple. A right cross from Goku was dodged, a left straight from Cooler blocked, and then it was back-and-forth again, descending downward.

Finally, the two broke the exchange, coming to a halt on different rocks jutting out from a sizable lake as they assessed each other.

"I must say, I'm impressed, Saiyan," Cooler calmly stated. "I can see how my brother would underestimate you."

He smirked at the slight widening of Goku's eyes. "Oh, yes, Freeza is far stronger than he revealed to you." The smirk became downright vicious. "And so am I, though he held the advantage for a long time."

No longer, though. Be honored! You are the first to ever see this transformation."

Goku's eyes widened further as Cooler's power suddenly began shooting up, his chest ballooning in size. Remembering Piccolo's account of his fight, Goku shot forward, intent on interrupting the transformation, only for the burst of power from Cooler's legs growing to knock him away.

By the time Goku landed on his old rock, Cooler had almost completed the transformation. He now stood almost twice his previous height, the bone covering his head transformed into a spiked crest. Two additional spikes jutted from the backs of his wrists. The worst, though were his eyes, a deep, uniform red.

Goku caught a glimpse of a slightly demented grin before a bone mask slotted into place over Cooler's mouth, completing the transformation.

"I'LL CRUSH YOU!" he shouted, charging forward.

"Crap!"

~o~

Gohan eyed the three aliens in front of him as Goku and thisâ€¦ Cooler faced off. Three on one was hardly ideal, but from the power he could feel none of them were as strong as the Freeza they'd faced.

"Krillin," he ordered. "Go to Korin's, get us some senzu. I have a feeling we're going to need it."

"But what about you?" Krillin demanded. "I can't leave you here to fight them alone!"

"What?" the salamander alien sneered. "A little shrimp like you fighting all three of us? What a-"

Neiz was promptly cut off by Gohan's foot impacting his schnoz, sending him skipping off the river and into the treeline.

"Krillin, go!"

"You little brat!" Dore shouted, swinging a kick at the demi-Saiyan.

As Krillin flew off, Gohan caught the kick on his forearm, only for Salza to knee him in the back of the head. The blow didn't do much, and the young boy quickly recovered and let himself fall on his hands, rearing back and catching a charging Salza in a mule kick. And that left him open for Dore to catch him with a kick to the gut and punt him skyward.

Once again, it didn't hurt, and Gohan took the opportunity to fire an energy blast downward. Both Dore and Salza tore skyward away from the blast, Neiz just following behind.

The green-skinned alien arrived first with a knee strike that Gohan used to vault up and kick Dore straight in the gut. Salza tried an

overhead smash that Gohan dodged, and was kicked in the back for his troubles. And Neiz took a punch to the face that sent him spinning.

All three members of the Armored Squadron fell back to regroup, nursing some painful bruises, while Gohan watched and waited.

'_I can do this,' _he thought, fists clenching in determination.
"HAAAAAA!"

A blue aura sprang up around Gohan as he drew upon his maximum power. The scouters the Armored Squadron wore dutifully beeped and relayed the information to their users.

"This-This is impossible," Salza breathed. "His powerâ€¦ it's increasing even more!"

"That wasn't his maximum?" Neiz yelped.

On cue, all three scouters exploded, and Gohan shifted into a combat stance.

"Weâ€¦ may be in trouble," Salza admitted.

"Not if we attack him all at once," Dore countered. "He's crap against multiple opponents. We surround him, and beat him down."

"I don't think he's going to let usâ€¦" Neiz whimpered.

"DYAAAH!" Gohan shouted as he proved the amphibian right by flying straight at them at speeds they could only barely track. The Armored Squadron managed to scatter in time, but Gohan merely blurred before slamming his leg into Dore's chest, leaving the green-skinned warrior gasping for breath. Another punch sent him careening down into the ground, shattering the rock and throwing up a huge cloud of dust.

By this time the other two members of the Armored Squadron had regrouped. Or, at least, one of them. Salza was nowhere in sight.

Gohan turned a hard gaze on Neiz, who for his part was quaking in his boots and clutching his hands together. The demi-Saiyan charged up a small blast in his right hand before loosing it at Neiz. Naturally, he dodged, but he found Gohan waiting for him, foot drawn back for a devastating kick.

It never landed; instead, Gohan had to hastily evade a crackling blast of energy.

"Damnation!" Neiz spat as Gohan zoomed back in, slamming his foot into the amphibian's gut and sending him flying into the ground as well.

With two opponents down, Gohan turned to find Salza - and was promptly distracted by an absolutely _colossal _explosion of blue energy in the sky.

"Dadâ€¦" he breathed. And then his stomach erupted in pain.

"Word of advice, kid," Salza sneered as he pushed his ki blade a bit

further into Gohan's gut, eliciting a pained twitch. "Don't gawk at the pretty explosions until _all _your opponents are dead."

Weakly, Gohan tried to grab at Salza, but with the energy blade in his gut he didn't have the strength.

"Still, be proud. You pushed the Armored Squadron further than anyone else." He withdrew the blade with a wet squelch, letting Gohan's limp form fall into the river below.

Salza's hand automatically went to his scouter to confirm the kill, only then remembering that it was broken. He let out an annoyed tsk before levitating back down to the ground next to the crater Dore was lying in. Thankfully, he was alive and mostly intact.

"I see you're alive, Dore," Salza stated.

"Owâ€|" the green-skinned alien groaned. "Did someone get the number of the spaceship that hit me?"

"Oh, get up you big lummoX," Salza snapped, lightly kicking his subordinates' side. "We should probably check on Lord Cooler, see if he's finished."

"I'm fine tooâ€|" Neiz weakly announced from his crater.

"That's good."

Salza's eyes shot up to the green-skinned, cape-and-turban-clad form of Piccolo descending towards them, his eyes icy cold.

"It means I get to kill you myself for what you did to my student."

"A Namek? What are you-"

Salza never finished that sentence as Piccolo's hand tore a new hole in his torso. The blue-skinned man blinked, whimpered, and then slumped over, dead.

"Hey, Salza! What's going on up there? Salza!"

Face still grim, Piccolo floated up and simply dropped an energy ball on top of the two prone aliens. He had bigger things to worry about. Namely, the absolutely _massive _ki-powers he could feel a few miles away. One as dark and twisted as Freeza's, and the other full of rage and sorrow - and _familiar_.

'_Gokuâ€|" what's happening to you?'

~o~

"GAH!" Goku shouted as he slammed into another cliff, shattering it into a million pieces. The martial artist had clearly seen better days. Burns, bruises, and small cuts littered his exposed skin, and his orange overshirt was simply gone, the pants and blue undershirt full of holes. And as he hauled himself to his feet again, the perpetrator of his torment landed in front of him, as casual as you please.

"I'm impressed I haven't killed you yet," Cooler stated. "Then again, you Saiyans always were stubbornly hard to kill."

"Gee, thanks," Goku weakly replied, his mind furiously trying to find a way out of this mess. The 10x Kaio-Ken had done nothing to help, and the 20x had only slowed him down a little. And no way was this guy going to give him time for a Genki-Dama. "I don't suppose you could spare me?"

"Hah! And let you get strong enough to defeat me?" Cooler scoffed. "I don't think so!"

The Arcosian raised his hand, energy forming within.

'_Sorry, guys,' _Goku lamented. '_I don't think I can do it.'_

And then Gohan's ki vanished, as if it were a candle that had been snuffed out.

'_No.'_

The sounds of the outside world - the water, the wind, the birds, Cooler's energy blast - all faded away. He desperately cast his senses out to try and catch a hint, any hint, of Gohan's ki.

There was nothing. Not with Cooler's massive well of power blanketing everything in the area.

'_No!'_

Goku faintly felt his teeth grinding together. He didn't care. He felt the denial slip away and the anger come, welcoming and relishing it for only the second time in his life.

And, deep inside him, Son Goku felt something break.

"NO!"

Golden fire roared to life around him, scattering the air and water and shattering rock dozens of yards away. Cooler, eyes wide, took a step back as the power of the Super Saiyan buffeted his skin and senses.

"What is this?" he demanded. "What are you?!"

"I understand now," Goku said, his voice deathly calm. "What Ginyu and Vegeta and the Great Elder were saying. You came to this planet to find a Super Saiyan, didn't you, Cooler? Well, you've got one now!"

Cooler gaped for a second more, then composed himself and raised an arm back to launch the energy blast he'd been charging. He never got the chance, as a vice-like grip latched onto his arm.

"Gnh!" he grunted as he saw Goku glaring down at him.

"You're just like your brother, killing innocent people just to satisfy your own selfish desires," he snarled. "Well, no more! You die today, Cooler!"

And with that, Goku slammed his fist into Cooler's gut. And then he did it again. And again. And again. Cooler doubled over, and Goku wrenched his arm up, before slamming a kick into his jaw that sent him flying upwards, his mask shattering.

Calmly, still calmly, Goku charged up an energy blast and hurled it at Cooler. The Arcosian had just recovered when the blast hit him dead on in a massive fireball.

Goku grimly watched as the smoke cleared, revealing Cooler, battered, bleeding, and furious, but very much alive.

"Damnâ€¦ youâ€¦" he growled, his whole body quivering from rage. "You Saiyan _ape_! You will die, you and your planet with you!"

Raising his finger, Cooler smirked as a crackling energy ball the size of a building burst into existence above him.

"Try stopping this!" he crowed. And then he threw it down.

For a moment, Goku simply glared at the ball, and then he crouched down and cupped his hands behind him.

"Kaâ€¦ meâ€¦ haâ€¦ meâ€¦ HA!"

His hands shot forward, unleashing a torrent of blue energy that swept aside the Death Ball like it wasn't even there, slamming into Cooler and taking him into the atmosphere and out of sight. For several agonizing minutes the energy burned at the Arcosian, and at some point he must have passed out, for when he opened them again he was in space, still propelled by the Kamehameha.

'_Damnâ€¦ himâ€¦ Where am I?' _

A glance behind him revealed the Sun, looming ever closer.

'_The system's star. Perfect. I just need to blow that up and let them all freeze to death in the dark and cold.' _

A beat, and then his eyes widened in realization.

'_Wait. I'm heading right for it!' _

Frantically, Cooler flailed at the Kamehameha, trying to arrest his momentum. Weak as he was, though, it was futile. The blast carried him into the Sun, and not even a being of his power could resist the power of a star for long.

Soon, not even a trace remained.

~o~

Goku let his hands fall as the Kamehameha vanished from sight, tracking Cooler's ki. When the signature passed the Moon, he let himself relax, the golden aura fading, letting the weight of his exhaustion, injuries, and grief hit him all at once.

"Gohanâ€¦" he moaned, slumping down to the ground.

"Good job, Goku."

The Saiyan whirled on Piccolo, grabbing him by the front of his mantle.

"Gohan is _dead, _and all you have to say is 'Good job'?!" he snarled. "I thought you'd changed, I really did."

"Calm down, Goku," Piccolo ordered, pushing the Saiyan away from him. "Cast your senses out. I think you might find a pleasant surprise."

Goku tamped down the urge to tear Piccolo's head off, and did as he was told. Almost immediately he felt the blazing beacon of Gohan's ki.

"How-" he breathed.

"You're damn lucky I was already on the way with Senzu when this fight started," Piccolo replied, a smug grin on his face. "I passed on the Senzu to Krillin and went ahead to where the fight was. I couldn't stop him from getting stabbed, but I did take down his attackers, and with Krillin at ready I knew Gohan was in good hands."

Goku gaped for a second before slumping forward, gripping the Namekian's mantle like a life preserver.

"Thank you, Piccolo," he whispered.

"Of course, Goku," Piccolo replied, before once again pushing Goku away. "I think you should go see your son."

"Yeah, just one thing," Goku agreed, sighing. "This was Freeza's _brother_, Piccolo. If he has other familyâ€|"

He trailed off, unable to finish the thought. He didn't need to; Piccolo immediately grasped the implications.

"Then we train, and deal with them when they come," he firmly stated, only a slight shaking of his clenched fists betraying any anxiety. "For now, it's time to rest and heal."

Goku nodded, and the two took off, flying back to where Krillin and Gohan were. And yet, even as they did so, they couldn't help but feel they were forgetting something.

~o~

"Aw, jeez," Oolong groaned as he crawled out from where he'd been hiding. "The campsite's wrecked! And I don't know where anyone is! Aw, this blowsâ€|"

"Hrrrâ€|"

Gulping, Oolong slowly turned around to see an Allosaurus looming over him. A very _large _Allosaurus.

"Ah, come on!" the pig groaned, hastily transforming into a rocket and flying away. "Dammit, now I'm never gonna find them!"

3. Chapter 3

****Chapter 3: Logistics****

****AN:** Just a reminder that, by necessity, I am taking quite a few liberties with many of the relationships here. Toriyama was very bad about giving us details on a lot of the relationships in the series, leaving us fanfic writers to fill in the gaps. ******

****Let me tell ya, it's not easy. ****

"I will ask you only one more time. Who killed my son?"

Privately, King Cold wished he could just blow up this damn rock and be done with it, but the old coot in front of him had stubbornly refused to divulge any information despite Cold spending a solid hour killing Namekians in front of him and repeating the question. Hopefully, the squirming child held by the neck in his hands would persuade the damn slug.

"I will not," Muri growled, where he was held kneeling to the ground by two of Cold's soldiers. "We have our honor, and I will not sully it by betraying our saviors to the likes of you!"

Cold sighed and idly snapped the child's neck, though not before noting the defiant glare it had been shooting at him.

"I see my efforts are wasted on you," Cold sighed, dropping the Namekian child to the ground. "Men! Return to the ship. I shall follow soon."

Both soldiers saluted, and took off for orbit, where his ship floated. Cold gave it a couple of minutes, before silently rising into the air and conjuring up a Death Ball on one finger. A careless flick of his wrist sent the ball into the planet below, burrowing beneath the crust and then exploding, turning Planet Namek into a new asteroid field.

And yet— Cold didn't feel the satisfaction he usually did from blowing up a planet. Most likely it was the still-defiant glare on that old Namekian's face, even as his race's doom destroyed his world.

Letting out a tsk of annoyance, Cold took flight back to his ship, entering the hanger bay in the bottom. Soldiers and technicians scattered in his wake as he made for the bridge, and work paused for just the barest of seconds when he arrived.

As Cold sat himself down on his throne, most of the bridge personnel went back to work. Only one had the courage to approach the towering Frost Demon.

"Your Majesty," Harkon stated, kneeling and bowing his head respectfully. "I bring news from Cooler."

Harkon was one of Cold's Generals, four soldiers with a power level north of 100,000 and proven command and administrative skill. Each commanded a quarter of Cold's army, and were called upon for the more difficult pacification campaigns, whether against new discoveries or

revolts. As a result, all four had a fearsome reputation, often able to induce a planet to surrender just by the knowledge that they were there.

Harkon, specifically, was a Shongairi, a rather canine-esque species with fur, digitigrade legs, and long snouts. His fur was dark grey streaked with silver, and predatory yellow eyes gleamed from under his brow. His uniform consisted of long undersuit pants and the standard gloves and boots, with a Ginyu-style armor on top.

"Oh?" Cold said, perking up slightly. "I do hope he's had better luck than I. It would be a shame to let Freeza's murderer get away due to lack of information."

Harkon didn't flinch as the glass observation blister cracked suddenly. "He certainly found something, your Majesty," he stated, choosing his words with care. "Apparently he had his Armored Squadron transmit the visual data via their scouters, because when his ship arrived there was a wealth of information aboard. Lord Cooler, sadly, was not on board, nor was the Armored Squadron."

Gravity seemed to almost increase five-fold as Cold's power flared at that news.

"Not on board, you say," Cold stated, his voice icier than the void outside the ship, but his face unchanged. "And what did this data show?"

Harkon couldn't help but sweat a little at his liege-lord's behavior. "A Saiyan, your Majesty," he replied. "Cooler was facing off against a Saiyan. A very powerful one. On a planet called Earth; I believe it was on one of the lists for possible sale, pending a cleaning job."

Gravity returned to normal as Cold withdrew his power. "A Super Saiyan," Cold spat. "I should have suspected. Freeza might have gotten caught off guard, but not Cooler, and only a Super Saiyan could have killed them both."

King Cold fell into a contemplative silence. The entire bridge crew held their breath for several tense minutes before their king spoke again.

"Tell your fellow Generals to drop what they're doing and meet us at our destination, Harkon," he ordered.

"All of them, your majesty?" the wolf-like alien confirmed. "That will take several months."

"Good," Cold said. "If I am to face off against a Super Saiyan, I must prepare. Set a course for Planet Freeza 18, it has the facilities I need."

Harkon frowned. Planet Freeza 18 was a ball of ice, inhabited only by some researchers and an orbital refueling station. Ah well, his was not to wonder why.

"At once, your majesty."

Cold's ship rapidly accelerated to light speed, not knowing that they

were being watched.

~O~

It was a subdued group that flew back to Mt. Paozu. Gohan kept absentmindedly rubbing at his gut where Salza had stabbed him, Goku kept glancing back at his son, matched by equally concerned glances in his direction by Piccolo, and Krillin was deep in thought. Hell, even Oolong was quiet, mostly due to being safely inside his aircar, which had somehow survived the battle unscathed.

As such, King Kai calling Goku out of the blue was a somewhat welcome reprieve.

"_Goku! I only just checked Earth, what happened?!"_

"_This guy named Cooler tried to kill us," _Goku telepathically replied. "_Said he was Freeza's brother."_"

"_Damnation!" _King Kai spat. "_Well, there goes that plan."_"

Goku frowned. "_Plan?" _he demanded. "_What plan?"_"

The saiyen got the distinct impression that his old master was _embarrassed. "The plan to keep the rest of Freeza's family from finding you!" _came the response. "_Ugh, Freeza was supposed to disappear with no clues, leading them on a wild goose chase across the galaxy. Either they'd never find you, or you'd get strong enough in the intervening years to kick their asses. Well, nothing for it, so I suppose I'd better tell you. King Cold is almost certainly heading to Earth now."_"

For some reason, that name sparked a frisson of cold dread that ran down Goku's spine. He was vaguely aware of his companions sending him concerned glances, but ignored them in favor of King Kai.

"_Alright, how strong is he and when is he getting here?" _Goku immediately asked.

"_... Really?" _came the response. "_No questions about his relation to Freeza?"_"

"_Doesn't matter. What matters is that he's coming, and we need to prepare. So, how strong is he?" _Goku retorted.

"_... Point. I'm afraid I can't help you much on either front. I know he's stronger than both Freeza and Cooler, but that's it, and I don't know how long it will take for his forces to assemble. A month, at the least, but almost certainly more."_"

King Kai chuckled grimly at the shock that rippled through the telepathic link. "_Oh, yes. King Cold is of the 'throw minions at the problem' school of empire management. Problem is that he's got enough minions to make it work."_"

Goku sighed and closed his eyes. No rest for the weary, then. "_Thank you, King Kai."_"

"_No problem, Goku. Talk to me if you need anything!"_"

"Dad?" Gohan asked nervously as King Kai ended the talk. "What's wrong?"

"I'll tell you when we get home, Gohan," Goku sighed. "This is something we all need to hear."

Now the flight was even more awkward, though thankfully it was the last leg and thus mercifully short. All four touched down outside of the Son house, Oolong's aircar landing shortly afterward.

"Oh, you're home early," Chi-Chi stated as she stepped out of the house. "Did something go wro-"

She froze, taking in the tattered state of Goku and Gohan's clothing, as well as Piccolo's presence.

"W-What happened to you?" she numbly breathed.

"We were attacked," Goku grimly stated. "Freeza's brother, Cooler. He and his men almost killed both me and Gohan."

Chi-Chi's eyes zeroed in on the ragged hole in the stomach of Gohan's gi, her mind connecting the dots. She slumped to the ground, shivering, prompting Goku to walk up to her and hug her close to him. Muffled sobs sounded out, her husband stroking her hair and back. He was aware of the rest of the group heading inside, but Chi-Chi took priority right now.

"Sssh, Chi-Chi. We're alive. We're fine," he said soothingly, over and over. Eventually, the sobs quieted, the shaking stopped, and she pulled back from the embrace.

"O-Oh Godâ€¦" she breathed. "Freeza's _brother_â€¦ does he have any more family?"

"Yes," Goku replied simply.

"Alright," Chi-Chi said, rubbing her eyes and standing. "Let's go inside and talk to the others. We need to discuss training."

Goku nodded, and took Chi-Chi's hand. The two went back into the house, finding Gohan, Krillin, and Oolong at the table, silently nursing cups of hot chocolate; Piccolo was leaning against one wall, looking pained.

"Are you alright, Mom?" Gohan asked as they walked in.

"No, but I can manage," she replied. "Goku, you have something to tell us?"

Goku nodded, and stepped forward. "Cooler wasn't the only relative Freeza had," he announced. "There's at least one more: King Cold. King Kai just told me that he's coming to Earth, likely with an army in tow. And that he's stronger than both Freeza and Cooler."

"I'm fighting!" Gohan immediately announced. "Coolerâ€¦ he-he could have attacked us _here_. At _home_. And a fight like that would have killed you by accident, Mom." His fists clenched, cracking the mug he was holding. "I _won't_ _let_ that happen."

"You'reâ€¦ you're right, Gohan," Chi-Chi reluctantly agreed, prompting everyone in the room besides Goku to look at her in shock. "I-I don't want you to fight, butâ€¦ I think the only way for you to be safe is for you to be strong."

Gohan gaped for a moment before rushing forward and wrapping her up in a hug. "Thankyouthankyouthankyou!"

"Gohan!" she squeaked. "Can'tâ€¦ breathe!"

"Oh! Sorry, Momâ€¦" Gohan muttered, floating away sheepishly.

"We'll need to alert everyone else," Piccolo stated.

"I can tell Bulma and Yamcha," Oolong replied dismissively. "You guys're going to have to find Tenshinhan and Chiaotzu on your own, though. Those guys have practically vanished off the face of the Earth!"

"Piccolo, you'll need to handle Gohan's training, at least at first," Goku decided. "I need to master the Super Saiyan. That leaves Krillin to-"

The Saiyan blinked, realising that at some point Krillin had left. "Krillin?"

~o~

Krillin sighed again as he flew over the ocean towards the Turtle House. He felt a little bad about leaving Goku and the rest hanging like that, butâ€¦ honestly? It probably didn't matter. He'd fight, of course, but if King Cold really was stronger than Freeza, he'd never make a dent.

These feelings of inadequacy weren't new, of course. They'd been lurking in the back of the martial artist's mind since the 23rd Budokai. Piccolo had been so far out of his league it wasn't even funny, and while he'd kind of ended up making it his business to do well against people way out of his league, it was liable to get him killed sooner rather than later. And he was painfully aware that the Dragon Balls weren't going to be able to bring him back anymore.

It all came down to that question. What could he do? The answer he came up with was always "not much."

When he finally came up on the Turtle House, he didn't go inside. Instead, he sat on the beach, watching the stars, and eventually the sunrise. By the time he felt Master Roshi sit down next to him, it was already morning.

"Something on your mind, hmm?" the old man wondered. "Perhaps that new video I found under your-"

"Master Roshi!" Krillin exclaimed, his face red.

"Ho ho ho, nothing to be ashamed about, lad!" Roshi chuckled, a lecherous grin on his face. "I remember being that age, only back in my day we didn't have videos!" The martial arts master laughed a few seconds more before sobering up. "But I don't think that's what's actually on your mind."

"No," Krillin sighed. "It's this King Cold guy Goku told us about. Yet another threat against the Earth. I justâ€¦"

Roshi stayed silent, waiting for his student to finish the thought.

Finally, Krillin fell on his back, eyes going up to the sky. "I don't want to be useless. Andâ€¦ I'm so far behind already. What can I really contribute?"

For a moment, both martial artists were silent, before Roshi stood up and held his hand out to Krillin.

"Let me show you something that might be able to help," he said as he hauled Krillin to his feet.

Turning out to sea, Roshi slipped off his sunglasses and clapped his hands together. Veins popped up on his forehead and arms as he concentrated, Krillin's eyebrows rising at the amount of ki concentrated between his hands. After a few seconds, Roshi's hands spread apart, ki crackling between them.

"Bankoku Bikkuri Shou!" he shouted, the energy shooting out like a lightning bolt.

And, much like a lightning bolt, it fizzled after a few hundred yards.

"Eheheheheh," Roshi sheepishly laughed, rubbing the back of his head. "It's more impressive when you hit something with it."

"No, that's amazing!" Krillin exclaimed. "One of Cooler's goons used a similar technique! I'd be happy to learn it, Master Roshi. Thoughâ€¦ why me?"

"Why you?" Roshi parroted, bewildered, as he slipped his sunglasses on. "You're my student! I have every right to teach you my techniques!"

"No, I mean, why not Goku or Yamcha?" Krillin asked again. "They're your students, too."

"Yes, they are, but the Turtle School is not the core of their skills," Roshi answered. "Goku has had so many more masters, he's moved quite away from my original teachings into some sort of...synthesis. It's really quite impressive. And Yamcha already had his own style when I taught him; I merely helped him refine it. Besides, neither of them have been living with me for the past decade or so."

Krillin gaped for a second, before bowing respectfully.

"I thank you for your tutelage, master," he humbly stated.

"Now, now, none of that!" Roshi waved off, turning and walking back to the house. "C'mon, we can start in the afternoon. In the meantime, you've gotta show me that video!"

Krillin groaned, but good-naturedly. This was the way it was with

Master Roshi, after all. And honestly, some boring old unwinding might be just what the doctor ordered, at least for now.

~O~

Tenshinhan sighed as Piccolo flew off. More invaders; it was like the Saiyans all over again.

That connection made him flinch as it dredged up memories. Memories of fighting - and dying - against an unstoppable force.

Still, they wouldn't all be fighting Cold at once, unlike against Nappa. Most likely the army Piccolo had mentioned would be dispersing to attack targets all over the world, and those were opponents he could face.

He felt more than saw Chiaotzu float up next to him. "Tenshinhan? What did Piccolo say?"

"We're going to be under attack again soon," the martial artist replied grimly. "This time it's Freeza's father or something." His face drew up in a grimace. "Chiaotzu, I really think you should sit this one out."

"No!" Chiaotzu suddenly shouted, causing Tenshinhan to take a step back in surprise. "I-I'm sick of being useless! Of-Of dying while everyone else fights! I'm going to train, and I'm going to join this fight, and I'm going to _help!_"

As Tenshinhan stared into his partner's face, he found something he hadn't ever seen: a competitive fire, a _drive_. Chiaotzu had never shared his passion for martial arts, for developing his skills and power for their own sake. And though he had been interested in the competition in their little circle at first, he hadn't ever taken to it with the same enthusiasm the rest did. He justâ€¦| coasted.

And looking at Chiaotzu's eyes, Tenshinhan found himself filled with pity for whoever was going to fight him.

"You have an idea?" he guessed.

Chiaotzu grinned, before speaking telepathically. "_I've been kind of neglecting this side of my skills, haven't I?_"

To punctuate the point, Chiaotzu picked up a rock with his telekinesis. Then another, and another, and soon a hundred rocks were swirling around him, each in a slightly different pattern. The level of control necessary wasâ€¦| dizzying, he had to admit.

"Krillin mentioned a member of the Ginyu force, far weaker than the rest but with the psychic powers to compete," he continued, sending one of the rocks flying into a nearby bluff with enough force to shatter it utterly. "Thisâ€¦| This is what I'm good at, Tien. And now I know I can develop it to fight at a higher level."

Tenshinhan continued staring for a moment, then grinned. "Yeah, I think that'll work," he agreed. "Spars before lunch?" Chiaotzu nodded. "Alright. You work on that, I think I'll pester King Kai a bit about that Spirit Bomb technique he mentioned."

~o~

Bulma glanced up from where she was tinkering on something - the technology her father had salvaged while rebuilding Goku's spaceship was _fascinating!_ - when she heard an aircar touch down outside. That was odd; Oolong was supposed to have been with Goku and Krillin for another day, at least.

Curious, the scientist stood, wincing at her sore muscles protesting the action, and climbed down the stairs. She found Yamcha already there as Oolong disembarked from the air car, looking uncharacteristically grave.

"So, who died?" Yamcha asked jokingly.

"Freeza's brother," Oolong casually stated, grinning as Yamcha and Bulma dropped their jaws in horrified shock. "Yeah, that was about everyone else's reaction, too. And now we've got what I'm pretty sure is his father coming to Earth to kill us all."

The silence that followed was deafening.

"Well, I don't know about you guys, but I need a goddamn beer," Oolong remarked, strolling off into the kitchen. "Or maybe something stronger."

Bulma and Yamcha stayed standing in gape-mouthed shock for another few minutes before both staggered over to the nearest couch and plopped down on it.

"Soâ€¦|" Yamcha breathed. "That's a thing that's going to happen."

"Y-Yeahâ€¦|" Bulma agreed. She was silent for a moment before looking up at Yamcha. "Are you going to fight?"

The ex-bandit was quiet as he digested that thought. Did he want to fight? A better question might be, what could he contribute? Against Vegeta and Nappa, he'd died before even getting to fight them. He'd sat out the Piccolo fight with a broken leg. And, of course, three tournaments, three straight first-round exits.

Something within him flared to life as he thought of those defeats. And just as quickly, it was tempered by thoughts of the woman next to him, that he loved. Maybe. It could be kind of unclear sometimes. And then, Yamcha was struck by a realization: he was half-assing martial arts, and he was half-assing his relationship with Bulma. How many times had they spent months, even years apart, because he was training? Or dead? How often had he slacked off to be with Bulma, rather than further his skills?

As the saying went, "Whole-ass one thing instead of half-assing two things." How Goku juggled family and martial arts training as well as he did was beyond him.

"Bulmaâ€¦|" he said softly. "How long have we been dating?"

She blinked. "What?"

"How long have we been dating?" he repeated.

"Uhâ€|" Bulma frowned as she worked out the years. "Aboutâ€| twelve and a half years? Off and on, of course."

"And how far have we progressed in our relationship since then?" Yamcha asked, holding up his hand. "Don't answer that, we both know the answer. At some point, if we want this relationship to work, then we need to commit. Both of us. And if we can'tâ€| then perhaps it wasn't meant to be."

"Yamchaâ€|" Bulma breathed in numb shock. "I-

"Take your time," Yamcha interrupted. "This isn't a decision you can rush. Besides, I've got a fight to train for."

And with that, he got up and started walking for one of the gravity rooms Dr. Briefs had installed recently, leaving Bulma behind, gaping at his back. She tried to say something, to do somethingâ€| but she did nothing. And then he was gone.

Shortly after he left, Bulma got up and made a beeline for the small wine rack her parents kept for the rare occasion they had formal guests over. Hopefully at least some of it wasn't vinegar, because she needed something a bit stronger than Oolong's beer at the moment.

~O~

Power flowed through him, golden like the sun and burning just as hot. And yet, what flowed through him was a mere fraction of the whole, a burning ball deep within him that was just out of reach. Great anger, he knew, would shorten the distance. But it was a level of anger he never wanted to feel again. And so he was left grasping, the power always just out of reach.

Son Goku heaved a deep sigh as he broke out of his meditation. Frustrating, summoning up the Super Saiyan on demand. But necessary if he was to have any chance against King Cold.

Opening his eyes, he was surprised to find the sun already starting to set. Naturally, his stomach chose that moment to voice its displeasure, and Goku let out a low chuckle. Ah well, it wouldn't hurt to call it a day. He had a month, at minimum, to figure this out.

Standing up and stretching out the kinks in his muscles, Goku tensed his legs to take off for home, when he felt a familiar kiâ€| wobbling through the air, for lack of a better term.

"Bulma?" he wondered, taking off toward where he could feel her ki signature.

He quickly caught up to the erratically flying aircar, pulling up alongside it. A glance into the cockpit revealed Bulma, and the luminescent blush and glazed eyes of the truly sloshed. Well, that explained the erratic flying.

Sighing, Goku dipped under Bulma's aircar and grabbed it, stabilizing the flight, before turning for his house. It was closer than West

City, after all.

Less than fifteen minutes later, the aircar was safely capsulized and Bulma was tucked into the spare bed, usually used when Gyu-Mao came to visit. After all, she had been quite unconscious by the time they arrived. As Goku softly closed the door, he sensed Chi-Chi behind him, a mix of exasperation and concern leaking into her ki.

"I can't believe Bulma would do something so reckless!" Chi-Chi said, before rolling her eyes as her husband opened his mouth to object. "Yes, yes, you've told me all about what you and her got up to in your youth, but I was under the impression she'd put those days behind her!"

"Yeah," Goku agreed, sending a bewildered glance behind him. "I guess we'll just have to wait until morning. Has Gohan gone to bed already?"

"Yup!" Chi-Chi replied, beaming. "I was worried about that Piccolo influencing my boy, or hurting him, but they're just working on form, and he seems to be having a great time!"

Goku chuckled, silently deciding not to tell Chi-Chi about the year Piccolo and Gohan had spent together training for the Saiyans.

~o~

Morning came to Bulma in the form of a hundred-man marching band in her head. Oh, wait, no, that was just the birds chirping outside and aggravating her hangover.

With nothing better to do - she couldn't go back to sleep, and her inner ear was loudly protesting any attempt to get up - she tried to remember what had happened. She was tinkering and then Oolong came back early and then-

Right. King Cold. Yamcha. And that and that.

She was shaken out of her musings by a knock at the door, followed shortly by Goku poking his head in.

"Hey," he said, jabbing his thumb out the door. "We've got some rice and orange juice out here, if you're up to it. And if you're not, I can bring it in."

"Mmmph!" Bulma groaned into her pillow.

"Got it," Goku nodded, ducking out the door. Bulma used the short time he was gone to wiggle herself into something vaguely resembling a seated position, one that didn't result in an intensifying of the dizziness.

When Goku returned, she took one look at the bowl of rice and grabbed the tray out of his hands, immediately tearing into the food. She was vaguely aware of Goku chuckling, likely at her spot-on imitation of his own feeding habits, but she didn't stop. The first bite had reminded her how she hadn't eaten dinner the previous night, and she was starving. And though it was just plain rice, she had a feeling her stomach wouldn't appreciate anything richer.

"Hey, Bulma?"

The inventor paused mid-bite, glancing up at her host. "Yeah?" she mumbled around her mouthful of rice.

"What were you doing flying out here drunk?"

She swallowed and grimaced, debating whether to tell him.

"Iâ€¦ Yamchaâ€¦ well, he basically gave me an ultimatum. Kinda. Gah!" Bulma threw her hands up in the air, still not stirring from her position on the bed. "I don't know! He's never done anything like this! All I know is he wants me to make a decision on our-!"

She paused, noticing that Goku looked intensely uncomfortable.

"What's wrong?"

"Iâ€¦" he hedged, rubbing the back of his head. "I think you should talk to Chi-Chi about this, not me."

Looking at the thoroughly bewildered expression on the Saiyan's face, Bulma had to agree. Taking pity on her friend, she nodded and said, "Yeah, I think that would be better."

Goku immediately scurried out of the room, leaving Bulma to giggle at his obvious discomfort. That done, she turned back to the food, and was just finishing it off when Chi-Chi walked in.

"Goku mentioned relationship problems?" Chi-Chi confirmed. "In between running outside as fast as he could, I mean."

"Yeah," Bulma nodded. "It started yesterday after Oolong got backâ€¦"

It didn't take long for her to tell the story. Of learning about King Cold, of Yamcha presenting the decision, of her need to try and forget that, which had led to a nasty bout of drinkingâ€¦ all of it up until she got into her aircar. Things got fuzzy there.

"Hmm..." Chi-Chi hummed. "Yamcha's on the passive side, isn't he? I bet his declaration caught you completely by surprise."

"Yeah, it didâ€¦" Bulma sighed. "Which just speaks volumes, doesn't it? Oh, what should I do?"

"Oh, that's simple," Chi-Chi replied. "You need to ask yourself if your relationship with Yamcha is worth the warts."

Bulma waited for more, but nothing came. "That's it?" she wondered.

"Only you can decide if he's worth it or not," Chi-Chi said. "You're a smart woman, Bulma, much smarter than me. You'll figure it out." Her expression sobered, and several lines seemed to spontaneously appear on her face. "I'm lucky Goku's so easygoing and forgiving. I don't think I'd handle your situation as well as you have."

Bulma gave the other woman a confused look. "I got drunk and went driving in my aircar."

"And that ruins my pointâ€¦ how?"

"Rightâ€¦" Bulma stated slowly. Best not to think about the implications of _that _statement. Did she want to stay with Yamcha, or not? Would it even matter after King Cold came through?

At that thought, Bulma's fists clenched. Maybe she wasn't a fighter, but she could do _something _against the invaders! Science would provide a means!

Filled with new resolve, Bulma swung her legs out and tried to stand up. Keyword being tried. The minute she was on her feet, the room started swaying and her nearly-forgotten headache redoubled.

"Okay, maybe I should stay in bed for a few more hoursâ€¦" she muttered as Chi-Chi caught her and helped ease her down.

~O~

General Harkon gazed down at the frozen Planet Freeza 18 from the observation blister of the bridge. Once, the ice cap had been a pristine surface almost as smooth as glass. Now, it varied between shattered mountains and thin plains of ice due to the repeated bursts of power King Cold had produced in the months they'd been in orbit. Thank God the refueling station had its own entertainment, otherwise those bursts would have been all they had to stave off boredom. That, and the other generals arriving. As it was, they were all dealing with an increasing number of disciplinary issues.

Where was he? Oh, yes, power. He had no idea what King Cold was doing down there, but the power on display boggled the mind. The planet-wide devastation? A _side effect_. Whatever his king was doing, it made it quite clear that this "Super Saiyan" stood no chance.

"General Harkon!" one of the bridge crew spoke up, breaking him from his musings. "His Majesty is returning!"

"Very well," he stated, rising out of his seat. "I shall go to greet him. Continue your duties."

The bridge crew nodded and went back to work as their General marched for the central hanger. He got there just in time to see Cold float up into the ship, completely naked and white with purple gems instead of the usual horned form Harkon was used to.

"You lookâ€¦ different, your Majesty," Harkon said carefully, even as he ducked into a respectful bow. "Your final form, I assume?"

"Yes," Cold replied. "I now have complete control over it. Are the other generals here?"

"Yes, your Majesty."

"All ships are to proceed to Earth, then," Cold ordered, sweeping past Harkon. "We have spent enough time preparing."

"Yes, your Majesty," Harkon replied as he followed. "Your Majesty, if I mayâ€¦ where are you going now?"

Cold paused, and shot a confused look back at the General. "Why, to get new armor fitted, of course," Cold stated, as if it was the most obvious thing in the world.

"Of course, sire," Harkon replied, bowing again. As he stood from the bow, he tapped his scouter. "Send the course to the other Generals, and tell them that we go _now_."

"_Yes, General._"

A few seconds later, Harkon felt the ship vibrate as it went to FTL speeds. In one month they'd reach Earth; and then nothing would stop them from destroying any resistance.

End
file.